

PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

Annual Report to the City Council July 2011 – June 2012

The Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC) provides advice and guidance to the City Records Administrator and Archivist on records management matters and implementation of the records program in the City. The PRAC is authorized to have seven citizen members appointed by the City Council for terms of two years. It is composed of professional archivists, records managers, historians, research specialists, and other citizens. The PRAC supports the mission of the Archives and Records Center, which was established by the City Council as follows:

“It is hereby declared to be the policy of the City of Alexandria to provide efficient, economical and effective control over the creation, distribution, organization, maintenance, use and disposition of all records through a comprehensive system of integrated procedures for the management of records from their creation to their ultimate disposition, to achieve complete, effective and economical documentation of the policies and transactions of city offices and departments, to identify and preserve archival records and, in conjunction with archival records, to provide reference services to the public.”
(Ord. No. 3189, 3/21/87, Sec.2; Ord. No. 3282, 4/16/88, Sec. 2)

During the period July 2011-June 2012 the PRAC held nine meetings. Each meeting had an agenda and was open to the public.

Summary of Activities

For the past fiscal year, the PRAC addressed several topics pertaining to the city’s records management program and submits the following observations and recommendations:

I. FACILITIES

Highlights:

- Acquisition of shelving for 352 additional boxes.
- Acquisition of newer vehicle for pickup and delivery of records.
- Repairs to heating system, elevator, roof, delivery door.

Needs: Short-term—Additional space

The Archives and Records Center has gone from using 1,950 square feet of the facility at 801 South Payne Street in 1983 to 8,000 square feet in 2012 and has reached total capacity for the

currently allocated space, thus creating a need for immediate short-term solutions. Space issues include:

- The archives room is full. This is a temperature and humidity- controlled space equipped with mobile shelving that holds records mandated by the state and city to be preserved permanently.
- City agencies must often delay transferring older records due to lack of storage space.
- Four rooms in the Records Center facility are currently being used by other city agencies for non-records storage.
- Currently paying for over 1,000 cubic feet of off-site records storage (at \$275/mo.) due to lack of space.
- No dedicated space for researchers to work.

The PRAC recommends:

- Allocation of underutilized space in the adjoining Facilities Maintenance Shop to the Records Center. Acquisition of this space would meet the space needs for the next 5-10 years.
- Transfer to the Records Center of storage rooms in the building currently being used by other agencies.
- Conversion of an existing storage room to a second permanent archives room with the addition of mobile shelving and temperature and humidity controls.

Needs: Long-term--New Facility

Due to age, the Records Center facility has mounting maintenance issues. Further, the city's permanent records, ill-advisedly and inexplicably, sit adjacent to the fire department's burn training tower. These are reasons enough to require a new facility. However, the driving force for the need of a new facility is that the city sanitation department will need to expand within the next 10-15 years and, to do this, they will need to acquire the land that the Records Center facility currently occupies.

The PRAC recommends:

- Immediate formation of a work group composed of staff from the Office of Historic Alexandria, General Services, and the PRAC to develop a plan to replace the Records Center facility for presentation to city council within the next year.

II. PERSONNEL

Highlights:

A savings of over \$18,000 to the city was accomplished through the recruitment of:

- Interns from George Mason University who performed 83 hours of work.
- Citizen volunteers who performed 647 hours of work .

- Inmates from the sheriff's department who provided manual labor to move boxes.
- A school volunteer program that provided 108 hours of labor.

Needs: Increased staffing

The Archives and Records Center was established in 1983 with 1.5 FTEs and stored a few hundred cubic feet of records. From a high of 3 FTEs in 2009, the staff was cut in 2010 to the current 2.4 FTEs while over 17,000 cubic feet of records are maintained. Personnel issues include:

- Increased volume and time for processing, evaluating, and disposition of records.
- City agency and department records survey updates have been put on hold.
- Increase in search and FOIA requests (an increase of over 55% in the past two years) has reduced staff time needed to maintain records.
- Response time for records retrieval and search requests for city departments has increased.
- City agencies face delays in pickup of records for storage.
- Integration of digital records with the records management program needs coordination.

The PRAC recommends:

- Full support of OHA director Lance Mallamo's request to restore the .6 FTE lost in 2010. To meet the increased needs of the Records Center, we recommend increasing the staff by 1 FTE.
- Require city-wide policy that FOIA requests be reasonable and specific in order to reduce drain on staff time.
- Work with ITS department to coordinate digital records policy and responsibility.

III. BUDGET

Highlights:

- Proposed FY 2013 budget of \$226,355 is an increase of \$21,484 over FY 2012 budget of \$204,871.

Needs: Restore budget to FY 2009 level

The declining budget through FY 2012 for the Records Center has resulted in the following budget issues:

- Reduction in operating supplies and materials. For example, the cost of records boxes has increased from \$1/box to \$3/box while the budget for operations has been reduced by over \$8,000 since 1998.
- Cost for tech support (\$1,944) has been added to the Records Center budget.
- Deferred maintenance and replacement of office equipment.

- Lost part-time employee.
- Reduction of professional development opportunities

The PRAC recommends:

- Restore the budget to FY 2009 level of \$231,000. For FY 2012, the Records Center operated with increased demands on a budget that was \$26,145 less than FY 2009 (a reduction of 11.3%).

IV. OPERATIONS

Highlights:

- For FY 2012, 1,532 boxes of records and 518 rolls of architectural drawings were accessioned; 1,394 boxes of records, 1,311 rolls of architectural drawings, and 162 non-records items were destroyed; and 318 pick-up and deliveries to city agencies were made.
- Cataloged photos of 18th century houses, the Torpedo Factory, and Market Square.
- Scanned Planning Commission minutes.
- Developed scheme for sorting tens of thousands of architectural drawings.
- Records center staff accessed over 1,631 boxes of records to complete search requests.
- Received 74 researcher visits.
- Scanned destruction orders and transfer lists to enable online access.
- Conducted numerous city-wide records management training sessions.
- Completed the appraisal and processing of 84 boxes of City Council meetings for records related to the desegregation of Alexandria schools (Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) Project) with the help of interns.
- Transferred authority and storage cost of non-government records (Davis-Ruffner collection), saving \$2,600/year.

Needs: Explore operational options

As the scope and size of operations has increased, there is a need to explore operational options to keep up with the demands placed on the small staff.

The PRAC recommends:

- Conduct a review of Records Center operations for opportunities for improvement.
- Increase use of electronic methods to improve operations.
- Work with ITS to review electronic records policy for opportunities to improve operations.
- Provide additional training to city employees to facilitate more efficient records transfer, research requests, and records destruction.

The Public Records Advisory Commission goals for FY 2013:

- Presentation to City Council of records management issues affecting the City of Alexandria.
- Meet with General Services to discuss short-term facility solutions.
- Begin work on proposal for a new Records Center facility.
- Evaluate the need to update the city Administrative Regulations for archives and records management which hasn't been updated in 20 years.
- Explore ways to increase coordination of records management between ITS and the records administrator and archivist.
- Continue to advocate for a strong records management program.

Recruitment and Leadership Plans:

Recruitment will take place through announcements on both records management and archives listservs as well as through the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, Northern Virginia ARMA Chapter, and other suitable venues.

Ensuring Turnover in Leadership: The Commission will vote to select a chairman every two years following the completion of his or her term. No chairman may serve more than six years consecutively. Virginia Arnold has served one year as chairman.

The following citizens served on the PRAC during the period covered in this report:

Virginia Arnold
Ellen Briscoe
Jeannine Jefferies
Anthony Jones
Nils Kandelin
Laura Vetter
Charles Ziegler

Respectfully Submitted,
Virginia Arnold, Chair
Nils Kandelin, Vice-Chair